

Let us pray: **Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.**

Today, we continue our sermon series on hope. This is the last of the series. Hope is important, so how can we increase our hopefulness and become less fearful, more motivated, more able to dream and capable of making a difference in this world? This sermon series covers seven factors that each of us can use in our lives to increase our hopefulness. Paying attention to each of these factors in our lives will enable us to be more hope-filled.

So far, we've covered six of the seven factors that raise our hope. Factor #1: **Recharge your batteries.** You can't be hope-filled if you are out of fuel in your life. Keep your life fueled and full of hopeful energy. We looked at 5 things you can do to keep your batteries charged: invest in your own growth, understand the power of worship, unleash the power of the Bible into your life, build great relationships and pay attention to whose voice you are listening to – listen to Jesus' voice.

Factor #2: **Raise your expectations.** If you have small plans you'll get small results, so believe that impossible things are possible. There are better days ahead. You can see those better days when you adjust your perspective on life. You can't be fearful and be hopeful at the same time. Instead of boxing yourself in, replace 'what if' with 'why not.'

Factor 3: **Refocus on the future.** The key Bible verse, Philippians 3:13: **But I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead.** The question to ask as you refocus is: 'what can this become?' Answering that question allows you to look at your life with a fresh vision so you can experience great comebacks and be fueled to reach for something better. Answering that question frees you to dream and gives you energy and stability.

Factor #4: **Play to your strengths.** The key Bible verse, First Timothy 4: 14 - **Do not neglect the gift that is in you.** Playing to your strengths means discovering and using your God-given talents and abilities. When you use your God-given talents, you are maximizing your potential and you discover your purpose in life. When you use your God-given talents, you can be freed from insecurity and inferiority and become motivated and encouraged free from fear of failure. When you use your God-given talents, you have at your disposal the best way to change the world and your stress level is lower and your joy increases.

Factor #5: **Refuse to go it alone.** Our key Bible verse – Ecclesiastes 4:9-10: **Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help.** We need supportive relationships to do our best and thrive. Last week, we looked at five types of friends and the types of relationships we all need. We need people who will help us cast our vision and friends who support us spiritually - soul sharpeners. We need models and mentors to help us guide our spiritual life. We need friends who listen to us, who can help us when we're down. And, fifth, we need friends who will tell us the truth about ourselves – tail kickers.

Factor #6: **Replace burnout with balance.** We looked at a few questions that gave us insight in how to deal with our particular situation. Am I trying to do too much in my life? Do I fill every waking moment with something to do? Am I running on empty? God wants each of us to be spiritually and emotionally healthy and balanced. The next question to ask yourself about stress and balance in your life - Am I dropping the right balls? Some balls don't bounce back when dropped. Are you out of balance because you believe you're invincible? God may be infinite, but we're not! Ask yourself, when I relax do I feel guilty? If you feel guilty when you relax, then it's time to check on your priorities and readjust and get your life back in balance. Ask yourself, am I putting first things first? Do you understand that God makes a big deal out of keeping your life in balance?

Let's move on to hope factor #7: **Play great defense.**

I love the story Ray Johnston, author of the *Hope Quotient*, used to introduce this chapter. He had just arrived in Florida on a hot and muggy day. At the conference center where he was to speak there was a beautiful lake – and he was going to take a swim to cool off.

On the dock, about to dive in, he noticed a man with a flowing beard sitting in a weathered chair by the dock. Ray greeted him making small talk. "Hot day?" The man replied, "yep." "Is it like this all the time?" Same reply, "yep." "Live here a long time?" "Yep." You get the picture.

Just as Ray was about to jump in the lake, the chatterbox said, "I wouldn't do that." That stopped Ray in mid-dive. "Why not? Is it against conference center rules?"

The man replied, "nope."

Ray looked at the bearded old man with a questioning face. Finally, the man said, "You're about to dive into the number two most alligator-infested lake in the state of Florida."

Ray turned around and looked carefully out at the lake. He saw between 8-12 alligators staring straight at him. He was sure they were all thinking: lunch!

There are predators out there that want to kill your hope and destroy your dreams. There are predators out there deadly enough to wreck your marriage, ruin your life, destroy this church's ministry or torch your business. That's why each of us needs a great defense.

What are those hope killers? What are those hope killers that will destroy your dreams? Let's look at five.

1. The first hope killer, **Bitterness and resentment**. Bitterness and resentment are emotional suicide that poison you and everyone around you. Resentment may not kill you, but it can make you do strange things. Some of you are old enough to remember the radio and the TV program, *Amos and Andy*. On one of the episodes, Amos was upset about a man who kept hitting him on the chest until Amos couldn't stand it any longer. Amos told Andy one day, "I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to stop that guy from hitting me. I'm going to strap some dynamite onto my chest and then the next time he hits me, he going to get his hand blown off!" Well, needless to say, Amos' bitterness would have harmed him as much as it would have harmed the guy that was hitting Amos on the chest. Bitterness is emotional suicide. Let it go.
2. **Worry and anxiety**. Worry is utterly worthless. You can't change the past and you can't control the future. All worry does is make you miserable today and shorten your life span. Corrie ten Boom said, "Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorry, it empties today of its strength." Consider this Bible verse: **Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.** (1 Peter 5:7) Do you believe these words? I hope so! George Muller once said, "The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith. The beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety." I know personally that worry and anxiety is difficult to let go of. The author of the book this sermon series is based on suggests that in your prayers at night, night after night, you say this Bible verse. **Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.** Then name specific issues that are distracting you from your faith. Give them to God. Say it out loud. "Ok, God, that issue is yours." It may take a few repetitions night after night, but after awhile God will take your worry and anxiety away.
3. The third hope killer: **Looking back and comparing**. Some people have rearview mirrors that are bigger than their car's windshield. Are you one of those people? Looking back, wishing things would have been different, is not a good strategy for developing hope in your life. Colin Powell, the former General and US Secretary of State, said about regrets: "What good are regrets? Regrets slow you down. Regrets cause

you to fail to pay attention to the future. So I never log, count, or inventory my regrets. I move on.”

Let that stuff in your rearview mirror go!

4. The fourth hope killer: **Guilt**. Through Jesus Christ your sins are forgiven. No matter what you’ve done in the past, if you ask God to forgive you – you are forgiven. Accept it and move on.

We have a confession every Sunday just to remind you of that fact. Your sins are forgiven!

If you’re ever going to become the person God gifted you to be, you need a strong sense of confidence. Accept God’s forgiveness and move on with confidence. Guilt will assassinate your hope. Don’t let that happen.

5. The final hope killer: **Past failures**. I’ve said before that businesses today say that if they’re not failing they’re not succeeding. The secret to this is not to dwell on past failures, but to learn from them and let them go. Mike Yaconelli reminds us, “Quit worrying about your failures. They are simply speed bumps on the road to better days.”

When we talked about spiritual gifts, we discussed trying out gifts until you find the ones you’re good at. Fail fast. Don’t dwell on the fast failure. Let it go and move on. Every successful person has failed many times.

Don’t let bitterness and resentment or worry and anxiety get in your way. Don’t let looking back in that review mirror keep you from looking forward in hope. Don’t let guilt or past failures distract you from your next success.

Most of us are more than aware of these hope killers and have experienced them to some degree in our lives. So, what steps, what strategies, can you and I use to keep these hope killers at bay? Let’s look at three.

1. **Never make decisions when you’re down**. As human beings we seem to be wired to make decisions when we’re down. We say, “I’m quitting” or “I’m leaving.” Or “I’m moving.” When your mind is stressed is not the time to make a decision. Don’t do it.

Decisions determine direction which determines destiny. If you want a good outcome in your life, if you want hope in your life, don’t make decisions when you are down.

2. This one may make you think. **Respond to bad news in great ways**. How can you respond to bad news in great ways? I think of that sappy song, *Look on the bright side of life*. When you look on the bright side of life, you are actually changing your future.

Thomas Edison’s corporate campus was leveled by fire and explosion in 1914. Edison was on the scene on December 6th when all he had worked for all his life burned up in front of him. That day, Edison told a reporter, “Although I am over 67 years old, I’ll start all over again tomorrow. I am pretty well burned out tonight, but tomorrow there will be a mobilization

here and the debris will be cleared away, if it is cooled sufficiently, and I will go right to work to reconstruct the plant.”

Edison later said, “There is great value in disaster. All our mistakes are burned up. Thank God we can start anew.” Edison had hope and a future. When you respond to bad news in great ways, who knows what the future may hold?

3. The third strategy to help you keep the hope killers at bay: **Shake it off and step up.** Some of you may know this story. A farmer owned an old mule that fell into an abandoned, dry well. The farmer determined neither the mule nor the well were worth saving so he decided to put the mule out of its misery by burying the mule while he filled an abandoned well. So, he started shoveling dirt down into the well. The mule brayed hysterically as shovel after shovel of dirt fell on his back. This was a wise old mule. He decided to shake off the dirt as it fell on him. The mule did just that. The dirt fell, he shook it off and stepped up on the dirt he had shaken off. Before long, that old mule had shaken and stepped his way to the top of the well. He stepped out of the well and into a new chance for life. We can learn a lesson from that mule. If we refuse regret, bitterness, worry, failures and guilt, we can use these negatives to lift us up. If we refuse to let the hope killers steal our future and bury us, then we set ourselves up for something great that God wants to do through us. So, shake it off and step up – to a new challenge, a future and hope.

That concludes **Play great defense**, the seventh factor that helps us raise our hope quotient.

Now that we’ve looked at the seven factors and how they can help each of us personally, how can we apply what we’ve learned to this church? What does a hope-filled church look like?

- **Hope-filled churches believe that God has better days ahead.** Instead of worrying about the past, a hope-filled church looks to the future – a future that’s better than the present. Just like in your personal life, when a church starts believing there are better days ahead everything changes.
- **Hope-filled churches take God-honoring risks.** A hope-filled church is willing to take risks and learn from the mistakes. Like individuals, if a church isn’t taking risks, trying new things, then that church isn’t going to move forward.
- **Hope-filled churches unleash compassion.** The early church members sold their possessions and gave to those in need. They shared the Good News of Jesus’ death and resurrection, that hope, with everyone. The people in their community knew there was something different about the members of the early churches. Are we unleashing our compassion towards those with needs in our community and serving to meet those

needs? Would anyone in the Coachella Valley, besides you and me, miss this church if it closed?

- **Hope-filled churches are known by what they're for, not what they're against.** Hope comes from living and serving like Christ, not from holding onto religious dogma.

The author of the *Hope Quotient* knows that our faith, our hope, in Jesus is based on three simple words. He is risen. We, as individuals, and as a church, base our lives and our actions on the knowledge that Christ was raised from the dead. If God can defeat death through Jesus, then God can give us power to live. That power can raise a dead marriage. That power can raise a dead career. It can raise a dead dream. It's the power to let go of guilt. It's the power to begin again. It's the power to be what you were always meant to be in the first place. That power is what gives us hope as individuals and as a church.

Being hope-filled is not an end in itself. Being hope-filled is a part of being a Christian. As the song says, *Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus*. Jesus is our hope. We can count on that.

We're covered seven factors that will help you and me lead more hope-filled lives. The seven factors help you be more positive, more joyful and, frankly, can set you apart from most other people. The seven factors help you to have a Christ-like attitude.

When you live a hope-filled, Christ-centered life, you are living the abundant life, the life that Jesus came to bring you.

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10:10)

Amen. May it be so.